



# Al-Risala 1993

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## Tolerance in Islam

Commenting on the 'History of Science' in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1984, the editor acknowledges that when Islamic culture was at its zenith, West European culture was at its lowest ebb.

The conquests made by the Prophet's followers began in the 7th century A.D. and by the 10th century, Arabic was the literary language of nations stretching from Persia to Spain. Arab conquerors generally brought peace and prosperity to the countries they settled in. One manifestation of this was the way the library of Cordoba in Spain began to flourish. It had 500,000 books at a time when scarcely 5,000 existed north of the Pyrenees.

The Muslims, moreover, were tolerant of the other monotheistic faiths, making it possible for Jews to rise to high positions in Islamic lands at a time when they were scarcely permitted to survive in Europe (16/368).

Musa Ibn Maimun (1135-1204), one of the great Jewish scholars, and well versed in Greek, Hebrew, Chaldaic (now a dead language) and Arabic, was so highly regarded amongst the Jews that they compared him to the Prophet Moses. They claimed, that from Moses to Musa no equal of the latter had been born.

Born in Cordoba he later went to Spain where he was appointed special physician to Salahuddin Ayyubi, the ruler of Egypt. In spite of Musa being a Jew, Salahudin Ayyubi spared no effort to raise him to an exalted position in the land.

## The discovery method

In education, there is a recently developed method of imparting skills and knowledge, based on research carried out by Jean Piaget and Jerom Brune, which does not give the student all of the data he needs, but attempts to create situations in which he feels the desire to learn things by exercising his own mind. This is called the 'discovery method.' According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

This method emphasizes problem-solving, minimizing guidance by the teacher and maximizing the student's opportunity for exploration and trial and error.

This principle in the education of children is based on the realities of human nature, for man has an inherent urge to increase his knowledge and, moreover, wishes to learn things by discovering them for himself. And whatever he discovers by himself forms a permanent part of his cultural repertoire. He tends to forget knowledge imparted by others, but what he has taken pains to discover himself, he never forgets.

Religious teaching employs the discovery method too. It takes us only so far along the path of truth and leaves us to quest after the unseen. Although the Qur'an teaches us about God, we must be constantly seeking after Him. It may tell us too of Paradise, but we shall have full knowledge of it only by striving to be pure in thought, word and deed. Belief in the unseen means an eternal quest to bring the unknown within our human sphere of knowledge. If God has hidden Himself and the world Hereafter from the eyes of men, it is because man must make his discovery himself. Bringing what lies in the unseen world into the seen world is all a matter of faith. The more one is strengthened in such faith, the higher one's hopes may be of entering the gates of Paradise.

## Fasting

On the subject of fasting the Prophet said, "Every good deed is rewarded from ten to 700 fold. But God has said that 'fasting is for Me, and I will give it its reward. Man abstains from food and from satisfying his desires for My sake?' One who fasts is destined to have two joys: one at the time of the breaking of the fast and the other when he meets his Lord."

Fasting as a form of worship has a unique quality which distinguishes it from all other forms of obeisance. While fasting, man not only abstains from normally permissible food and drink and from the satisfaction of lawful desires, but he also demonstrates in the process his determination not to hesitate if at any time he should be required to give up the barest necessities of life for the sake of God. He shows his willingness to go beyond obedience to sacrifice. It is because of this special aspect of fasting as a form of worship that it has been singled out for a higher form of reward.

In this world, being a true believer does not just mean making the difference between right and wrong, lawful and unlawful and then acting accordingly. There are times, when, in unusual circumstances, we have to hold back even from lawful things. Sometimes we are obliged to adopt the policy not of resistance, but of avoidance. Sometimes the desire to show oneself in the right is overwhelming, but one has to stay one's hand. Sometimes one has to remain silent in spite of having right on one's side and great eloquence at one's command. Sometimes one has to halt in one's stride in spite of having the strength to press onwards. Sometimes one knows certain actions to be right, but has to refrain from taking any active steps.

Fasting teaches us the lesson that in this world it sometimes happens that a lawful thing becomes unlawful and a desired thing becomes undersirable. Those who succeed in living their lives according to this stringent standard of piety deserve such munificent reward from God as defies the imagination.

## In giving we receive

According to *Time magazine* of October 17, 1986, "Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had long voiced a desire to visit the People's Republic of China. But as long as Britain ruled, a piece of Chinese territory, the crown colony of Hong Kong, such a journey was impossible. The 1984 Sino-British agreement returning Hong Kong to China in 1997 provided the price of admission."

Returning Hong Kong to the mainland was no easy task, for it amounted to losing a jewel from, the British Crown, but it was clear that the British Monarch's desire to visit China was not unconnected with Britain's avidity for trade with that country and, obviously, the ensuing gains would be immense. Relations between Britain and China had been uneasy over the last hundred years, but with the Queen's historic visit – the first ever made to China by a member of a British Royal family -- the gates to trade were thrown open. A successful piece of diplomacy, it paved the way to an annual trade agreement of over one and a half billion dollars.

A jewel may have been lost from the crown, but the subsequent benefits will be enormous. Clearly, we have to give in order to take. That is the way of the world.

## Where Islam and other religions differ

It is stated in the Qur'an: "He that chooses a religion other than Islam it will not be accepted from him, and in the world to come he will be one of the lost." (3:85).

The usual explanation of this verse is that Islam will become a means of salvation in the Hereafter because it is a complete religion; 'its Prophet is the greatest of all the Prophets; its Scripture is the most sacred of all the Scriptures. But this is not consistent with what is said in the Qur'an, and is little better than a weak argument in favour of a strong point. It also contradicts the saying, which appears in several places in the Qur'an, that "God does not wrong His servants in the slightest." It contradicts it, because it would have us believe that God had discriminated between different sets of human beings, in giving to those who lived before the Final Prophet an inferior religion and to those who came afterwards a superior religion. Such an allegation cannot be laid at God's door. It is contrary to God's nature that he should discriminate between his creatures in the bestowing of His mercy.

The true reason for Islam being the sole way to salvation is that it is the one and only religion preserved in its original form. In their own times, previous religions were just as valid as Islam is today. But the scriptures of old were tampered with. Their adherents interpolated and deleted at will. This having happened, these scriptures ceased to be authentic sources for the understanding of the Will of God. This is the sole reason that other religions fell by the wayside in later times, and that Islam alone survives as the one source of True Guidance.

## If we gain, why not?

A short time ago, I happened to meet an Indian leader who publishes an Urdu weekly. For a long time this paper had run at a loss, but later picked up and started making a profit. The history of its phenomenal upswing was interesting to listen to. He told me that when he had launched this enterprise, there seemed to be no way that the circulation could be made to exceed 3,000, and that this was a state of affairs which continued for a long time in spite, of his best efforts. Then, in 1985, came the controversy over the Ayodhya mosque (to the Muslims, the Babari Masjid and, to the Hindus the Ram JanmBhumi). Exploiting this issue to the full, he brought out a spate of sensational articles – most of them sheer bombast – with deliberately provocative captions. As anticipated, his paper's circulation soared from a mere 3,000 to a spectacular 30,000. Congratulatory letters began to pour in from all sides.

While the Babari Masjid type of dispute is bad news for the Muslim community at large, it is, on the contrary, the best possible news for the leaders of that community, for that is the kind of news which is grist to every political and journalistic mill. It is no exaggeration to say that while, for the general Muslim public, it is a tragedy, for the leaders it is more of a comedy. It would be wrong to think that this applies only to a few stray cases; it applies to the entire Muslim leadership and the entire field of Muslim journalism.

The above success story reminded me of a certain Muslim villager who made a habit of visiting graves and durgahs (saints' shrines) to ask for favours, although, strictly speaking, a good Muslim should visit such sites only to pray for the departed souls, the granting of favours being the prerogative of the Almighty. A religious scholar who lived in the vicinity tried to make him see the error of his ways by pointing out that such an act was tantamount to polytheism (*shirk*), but the villager's experience told him otherwise. It seems that whatever he had asked for at a graveside has been granted to him—even the birth of a male child. The advice of the scholar, therefore, made no sense to him, and he countered with: "If I benefit from going there, why should not I go?"

For the past twenty years, the writer has been advising Muslim leaders to eschew emotionalism in politics and to adopt a quiet constructive approach. To this end I have had meetings with the more prominent of the Muslims leaders, entered into correspondence with them, focussed attention on this issue through my writings and tried in every way possible to elucidate this point so fully that they would be left with no arguments against my point of view. Yet no Muslim leader is willing to accept this advice. It is because they are no different from the villager by the graveside. Each Muslim leader in his heart of heart thinks: "why not dabble in emotionalism? It is to my advantage."

It is a stark reality that what gives the greatest boost to both Muslim leadership and journalism is rioting. If communal riots were to cease in this country, we should see an end to their dominating influence.

According to Sajid Rashid, an Urdu journalist of considerable experience, “The most popular topic of the majority of Urdu newspapers is ‘riots’ and that, too, only Hindu-Muslim riots. The Urdu papers now find it inconceivable that a new issue should be published without some such sensational item. This is a matter of personal experience. The youthful editor of a weekly paper actually expressed such a desire to me. ‘If only there could be a riot – the circulation of my paper would increase.’



## The law of the universe

A cow gives milk. This is a universally accepted fact. But there are few who pause to think *how* it accomplishes this useful feat. In fact, it can produce milk only because it has the capacity to convert grass into milk. It is this unique ability to convert a simple substance into a more complex one which makes it possible in God's world for it to produce the precious liquid we call milk.

A similar capacity is found in trees and plants. From them we receive grain, vegetables and fruits. But under what conditions does this happen? It happens when the plant receives water and nutrients from the earth and then converts these into vegetables and fruits. A lower entity is admitted into the plant, the internal mechanism of which reproduces it in the form of a higher entity.

The same applies to the life of man. A process of conversion has to take place, if results are to be produced. To attain success, man has to take the stimuli of his environment, both positive and negative, his education whether good or bad, his moral and physical inheritance and 'convert' these into success in the way that a plant converts the nutrients from the soil into fruits. He has even to take his failures and extract from them such experience as will set him on a better and more successful course for the future.

Such is the law of the world, both for mankind and for other living things, whoever has the capacity to seize opportunities when they come his way and convert adverse into favourable circumstances will achieve success, while those who show themselves incapable of this feat will be doomed to failure.

The cow has been created by God as a sign of His will. It indeed shows us what God requires of us in this world. We may take in 'grass'; but we must give out 'milk.' Even when people wrong us, we are required to convert that wrong into a right. Even when we are beset by adversity, we are required to turn it to good account.

## Idleness

The Second Caliph, 'Umer ibn al-Khattab, often used to express his sense of disillusionment about people he had come to like, when, on further acquaintance with them he discovered them to be idle. "... On learning that he does not work, he appears to me" of no value (he has debased himself) in my eyes)."

Which way you look at idleness, there is no gainsaying the fact that it is a great evil, causing one to fritter away one's best talents and leaving one unqualified to face life. A student who is too lazy to study cannot ever hope to acquire knowledge, or have his critical faculties sharpened in any way, and his failure in examinations will leave him without the 'paper' qualifications which is the 'Open Sesame' to good jobs. Without the necessary groundwork, he will find himself leading a vacant existence, simply drifting from pillar to post. Even people who have managed to qualify themselves suitably cannot afford to rest on their laurels. When the period of education is over, it is equally necessary to be consistently hardworking. Many make the excuse between the receipt of a degree and entry into a profession that they are waiting for the right job to come along. But one cannot go on waiting for ever, simply idling away one's time.

Sometimes one inadvertently slips into idle ways because there are no economic pressures in one's life. Those who inherit legacies, or have property or investments which bring them some return are an easy prey to idleness. But this is no existence for a human being. Anyone who allows the poison of idleness to creep into his system might as well be dead.

Either one must opt for a regular job which brings one a suitable income and keeps one mentally healthy, so that he never becomes a financial or emotional burden on anyone else, or, if one is financially independent, one should turn one's attention to higher things, pursue noble ends, serve worthy causes and keep oneself fruitfully occupied day in and day out. A person with no sense of commitment is only living on the fringes of existence. He is out of touch with reality and will soon lapse into utter degeneracy. No really superior being has ever been found among the ranks of the idle. As the old saying goes, the devil finds work for idle hands.

## Sincerity and piety the essence of Islam

Uthman ibn Affan tells of how the Prophet said that he knew which testimony would save one from the Fire, provided it was uttered from the depths of one's heart. Umar offered to explain the nature of such an affirmation to the Companions. He said that it was the testimony of sincerity, which God had prescribed for the Prophet and his companions, and the testimony of piety, which the Prophet had pressed upon his uncle, Abu Talib, as the latter lay dying: it was, ultimately, the testimony that there is none worthy of being worshipped save God.

## Right man – right results

The late Sir C.V. Raman (1888-1970), who received the Nobel prize for physics in 1928, achieved international repute and is still the most famous name in the field of Indian science. His discovery, known as the Raman effect, is one of the established pieces of scientific information which is useful in the study of molecular energy levels.

Born in an ordinary family, (his father was a school teacher drawing a monthly salary of Rs. 10), Raman had to work hard in difficult circumstances to make his way to the top. This is how he described his journey to success – ‘A long history of frustration, disappointment, struggle and every kind of tribulation.’

All great men have their detractors, and one of them, wishing to underrate his academic success, commented that his famous discovery had been a mere accident, as in the case of many other scientists who had discovered important things just by chance. On hearing this, Raman displayed no annoyance but replied quite seriously that ‘the idea that a scientific discovery can be made by accident, is ruled out by the fact that the ‘accident’ if it is one, never occurs except to the right man.

Dr. Raman summed up the process of discovery in these words: ‘Right man, right thinking, right instruments and right results.’

## In the nick of time

A medical college professor, putting a student through an oral examination, asked him, "How many of these pills would you give to a man who had suffered a heart attack?" "Four," replied the student. A minute later, he piped up, "Professor, can I change my answer?" "You can, by all means," said the professor, looking at his watch, "But, regrettably, your patient has already been dead for 40 seconds."

Certain matters in life are so critical that they require the appropriate step to be taken without a moment's hesitation. But an instant decision must also be a correct one, otherwise the consequences could be drastic, and could mean a lifetime of repentance.

Our moments of decision-making are often very similar to our attempts to board a train. Catching a train requires preparation. We have to pack up our luggage, making sure we take the right things with us, buy a ticket, arrange transport to take us to the station and we must, of course, already be on the platform at the appointed time, otherwise we are surely going to be left behind. For the train is no respecter of persons. It arrives on time and departs on time, and pays no heed whatsoever to tardy passengers. If we are like the medical student who was caught on the wrong foot because of lack of preparation and who was much too late with the correct answer, the train of life will go on its scheduled course and we shall be left standing, wondering what to do next and how to avert the disastrous consequences of our failure to get on board. It is, therefore, necessary to be prepared for all eventualities in life. That means assiduously acquiring a good education and losing no time in gaining useful experience relevant to our chosen occupations. It above all requires a mental and physical readiness to seize opportunities when they come our way, and to be firm of purpose, never permitting one's energy to be frittered away in pointless vacillation.

## How do you win a Nobel Prize?

Nobel Laureate Professor Abdus Salam toured several Indian cities in 1986, and in one speeches he made (*Times of India*, 16 January, 1986), he cited South Korea as an example of extraordinarily rapid national development. He said that about 15 years ago, the gross national product per capita there was equal to that of India, but that thanks to the efforts the Koreans had made, it was now many times more. Giving the example of the team, who had come from South Korea to Trieste, in Italy, where he resides, to find out from him how Nobel Prizes were won, he said that a similar spirit needed to be inculcated in the people of the Third world. He felt that it was this questing spirit which was the basis for all progress, be it of an individual or of a nation, and that this was true of progress both in this world and in the world hereafter.

All too often a process of stagnation sets in the affairs of a nation and it would appear that an impasse had been reached in developmental matters. Instead of progress, there is decay. Instead of effort, there is inertia. When this stage is reached, a nation begins to tumble in disarray down the ladder of progress towards the lowermost rung and it is only the seekers, the strivers who can pull it upwards from such an ignominious position and set it back on the path of progress. It is only the questing spirit which can put it right up on the topmost rung of the ladder of progress.

## Trouble from within

The Muslims entered Spain in 92 A.H. and their rule in that country only came to an end in 897 A.H. But most of their 800 years there were spent in fighting the Christian armies, and during the last days, Muslim rule had become confined to Granada, while a vast area stretching on all sides was ruled by Ferdinand II (1452-1516).

(Sultan Abul Hasan) ascended the throne in 870 A.H. By this time the area of the Muslim state had been reduced to 4,00 square miles, while Ferdinand's Christian Kingdom had expanded to about 125,000 square miles. Ferdinand demanded that tribute should be paid to him by Sultan Abul Hasan, but the latter, being a man of courage, wrote in reply to the Christian King. "In the mint in Granada swords are now being made, instead of gold and silver coins, with which to smite you Christians." War then broke out between the two kings. In the course of the fighting, Sultan Abul Hasan defeated Ferdinand several times, but the final victory was won by Ferdinand.

The principal reason for the Muslim defeat was the role played by Sultan Abul Hasan's own son, Abu Abdullah Muhammad. After defeating Ferdinand's armies on 27 Jamadiul Awwal, in 887 A.H., the Sultan returned to find that his son, instigated by his mother, Fatimah, had raised the banner of rebellion against him. Supported by the garrison, this rebel son seized the Alhambra in 1482 and made himself master of Granada. This state of affairs led to a destructive civil war.

In the meantime, the Christian army was advancing, and one town after another had fallen before it. The Muslims found themselves in an ever-diminishing circle until only the doomed capital of Granada remained in their hands. Abu Abdullah was asked to surrender the city, but he refused. Ferdinand then with an army of 10,000 horses entered the plain of Granada and laid siege to the capital. The city was finally starved into surrender. The Christian army then entered Granada on January 2, 1492 and, on its towers, the crescent was supplanted by the cross.

Most of the defeats suffered by Muslims in the past have been the result of in-fighting. But this factor, one of the most decisive in Islamic history, is one of the least appreciated by the Muslims of today, for, heedless of the lesson which the past has to teach, they continue to engage in self-centred factionalism and mindless insurrection.

## Another day! How wonderful!

"When you wake up in the morning, jump out of bed and shout, 'Great! Another day!' You are a success." This was a view expressed by a prominent businessman, but it could very well be the view of the scholar, the sage, the ascetic, depending upon how you interpret success. Anyone, in fact, who regards the new day with such optimism is surely well-equipped, mentally and emotionally, to tackle whatever life has in store for him. But, whether we regard the appearance of the new day as one more joyful occasion for work or not can we honestly say that we have ever stopped to ponder over the miraculous aspect of day following night, for all eternity, as a result of the earth rotating on its axis and of the sun's never ceasing to flood with life-giving light on ever-changing hemisphere? Have we ever thought of this alternation of day and night as a totally unique occurrence and of this all being part of the divine pattern which produces such advantageous conditions for human existence? Nowhere in the universe, in fact, are there prime conditions such as we have on earth for the emergence and development of life as we know it. Other heavenly bodies are either too hot, too cold, too gaseous, too windswept or too fiery, or can be like Jupiter and the moon, proceeding in their respective orbits without rotating on their axes, so that one half of the globe is permanently illuminated while the other is for ever plunged in darkness. The denizen of such a sphere would have no rising sun to stir his enthusiasm and no peaceful sunset to signal the moment for rest. He would have no periods of vigour and achievement alternating with soothing periods of repose. For the human being, accustomed to his diurnal nocturnal alternation, such an existence should be one of utter staleness and weariness, with no refreshment ever in sight. Yet this pattern, to which all living things on earth have been attuned from time immemorial, is something which we take for granted, and for which we do not consider it necessary to offer up our thanks. But this unique ordering of day and night is God's own doing, for the special benefit of man, and we would do well never to lose sight of what an extraordinary blessing it is.



## Suicide

General Atiqur Rahman, former Chairman of the Pakistan Federal Service Commission, came to Delhi on an official visit in February 1984. An emigrant to Pakistan, he had worked before partition during the second world war with Field Marshal Manekshaw in Burma. At a meeting with journalist, he told of how, during his stay in Burma, Manekshaw had once been badly wounded, and the pain having become unbearable, he decided to put an end to his life by shooting himself. He asked Rahman to give him a pistol for this purpose, but Rahman refused. The General added, laughing, "Had I known at the time what General Manekshaw was going to do to us during the 1971 war, I would certainly have given him my pistol! (*The Times of India*, 20 February 1984).

Manekshaw's state of despair was such, during the second world war, that he wanted to commit suicide, quite unaware of the fact that 25 years later, he was to emerge the victor in the 1971 war.

If Islam holds suicide to be unlawful, it is because committing suicide means having despaired totally of any succour from God. What is equally bad is that it also signifies a refusal of the world hereafter. But if a man is convinced that he will not face extinction upon the death of the body, and that he will experience a rebirth in the world hereafter, he will never commit suicide. For one who is fully aware of the seriousness of life after life, the anguish of this life will pale into insignificance.

Besides this, there is another aspect to holding suicide unlawful – it conveys a message to man not to be forgetful of the future because of temporary hardships. The present world is one in which every man, woman and child has his or her moments of pain and grief. But these should be recognized as transient phase, and borne with stoicism and courage. Just think of Manekshaw who wished to annihilate himself, little realising that his name was to be emblazoned in the pages of history as a latter-day conqueror.

### God can hear even the smallest whisper

Certain individuals once asked the Prophet whether God was close enough for them to make whispered supplications to Him, or whether he was so far away that they should call His name out loud. This verse of the Quran was revealed in reply to their question: "When my servants question you concerning Me, tell them that I am near. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls Me... (2: 186)."

Abu Moosa Al-Ashari relates how on certain journeys there were a few people who raised their voices in prayer. "Do not strain yourselves," the Prophet told them. "You are not calling upon a Being who is deaf or absent. You are calling upon One who hears and is close to you, closer to any one of you than the neck of his mount." (Al-Bukhari, Muslim)

## Its own proof

There are many parts of the Qur'an which, on the surface, appear to be mere assertions, there being no evidence to support them. But, the fact is, that these statements are their own proof, for the language in which they are couched is superhuman. It is God alone – and no other – who is able to utter such words.

“Allah is He who created the heavens and the earth.” (Qur'an 14:32). This is a sentence which can never be uttered with regard to any being other than God. This in itself is evidence of its truth, for the only One who can make such a statement is He who is, indeed, the creator of the heavens and the earth. None other could ever dare make a statement of such a vast significance. Indeed, throughout the history of the world, there is no record of anyone ever having had the audacity to say: “I have created the heavens and the earth.”

Think! If Allah should enshroud you in perpetual night till the Day of Resurrection, what other god could give you light? ..... Think! If Allah should give you perpetual day, until the Resurrection, what other god could bring you the night to sleep in? ... (Qur'an, 28:71-72).

It befits no one other than Allah to utter these words, and that is why no one has had the courage to make such a statement. This in itself is ample proof that these are the words of God.

It is said in the Qur'an that surely “it is Allah who keeps the heavens and the earth from falling. Should they fall, none could hold them back but He. (Qur'an, 35:41). Ponder over these words. Who could ever have the temerity to utter them? Only One who is above the heavens and the earth could say such a thing. One who in actual fact has the power to keep the heavens and the earth under His control. No one could say such a thing as a matter of postulation. No human being has it in him to make divine utterances with his human tongue. This is a divine statement such as could only have been made by God. (119:4).

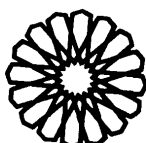
## Islamic Caliphate

There are certain of the basic principles of Islam which can be classed as objectives. While others clearly fall into the category of duties. For instance, no matter what the circumstance, gratefulness to God is placed before man as a definite aim. It is, indeed, man's purpose in life to be thankful to God. It is a requirement inherent in the Islamic life, a goal to which one must constantly direct one's steps. Charity, however, is an entirely different matter. It is a duty to be discharged only when one has the wherewithal. Man is obliged to abide by the divine law in regard to money only when he is already in possession of a sufficient quantity. An indigent member of the community is not, therefore, expected to make money at all costs simply in order to be able to obey divine commandments.

On the question of thankfulness, the Qur'an is explicit: 'Serve God and render thanks to Him' (39:66). It is nowhere stated, however, that one must make money in order to discharge one's obligations with regard to alms-giving. On the contrary, it is laid down that when God gives money to the believer, the latter must spend it as enjoined. It follows then that on all occasions and in all circumstances, we must be thankful to God, but that the commandment regarding money will be applicable to us only when God has already granted it.

Political power and government can, on a parallel, be categorised as matters of duty rather than as objectives to be aimed at. That is to say that if we find ourselves, by the grace of God, in positions of power, it is our duty to exercise that power to the best of our ability, always bearing in mind what God desires. But power should never be regarded as a specific target. It should rather be looked upon as a gift from God, bestowed by Him at His own discretion, when and where He wills. Once invested with power, it should be incumbent upon individuals and nations alike to apply to themselves all of God's commandments on the question of how to rule. It is significant that the verbal forms used in the Quran on the wielding of power are conditional in aspect, whereas those of a purposive nature are unconditional. For instance, worship is enjoined as a categorical imperative: 'Worship God till your death.' Nowhere does the Quran offer conditions such as 'If we give them mosque, then they will worship.' Matters of politics and government, on the other hand, are presented as being contingent upon sets of prevailing circumstances: 'Those who, once made masters in the lands, will attend to their prayers and pay the almstax, enjoin justice and forbid evil' (22:41).

The mention of justice of power here is in the conditional tense, while worship is clearly referred to as being absolute and unconditional.



## Let not the scourge of God be visited upon us

Those who keep dairy cows are faced with the perennial problem of preventing the calves from drinking up all their mothers' milk. This problem is often solved by tying a thorny piece of wood to the calves' heads, so that when they go to drink milk, the thorns prick the udders, causing the cows to shy away.

This 'thorny' approach is reminiscent of the way present-day Muslims behave when they attempt to communicate the divine message with which they have been entrusted to other nations of the world. Although duty-bound to convey the message of Islam to others, they have chosen instead to pick political and economic quarrels with those to whom they should be bringing the word of God. They have simply become worldly rivals of other nations instead of being their religious guides and mentors. Their politics of confrontations are like thorns on the face of the Muslim community which drive non-Muslims away before they can drink the God-given milk of Islam.

If we truly believe in the advent of the Last Day, when people will be called to account for their actions, we must do our utmost to shed these 'thorns.' If we fail to do so, there is a real danger of incurring the wrath of God and having to suffer punishment for the sins of others as well as for our own. We must at all times create an atmosphere which fosters receptivity to the message of Islam and encourages others to see it in its true perspective.

## From denial to belief

Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe, a Sri Lankan who heads the department of Applied Mathematics and Astronomy at University College, Cardiff, Wales, has been conducting research into the origin of life since 1962 in collaboration with the eminent English scientist, Professor Sir Fred Hoyle. The results of their research have been published in the form of a book entitled, *Evolution from Space*.

When the two scientists began their research, they were both agreed on one point: That the notion of a creator is inconsistent with scientific principles. But they were so shocked by their ultimate findings that they had to make a drastic reappraisal of their thinking. "From my earliest training as a scientist," says Wickramasinghe, "I had been thoroughly brainwashed into believing that science cannot be consistent with any kind of deliberate creation. That notion has had to be very painfully shed. I am quite uncomfortable in the state of mind I now find myself in, But there is no logical way out of it."

Both scientists made separate calculations of the mathematical probability of life on earth having begun spontaneously. Quite independently of each other, both arrived at the same conclusion that the odds against life on earth having had an accidental beginning were staggering – in mathematical jargon, 10 to the power 40,000. Add 40,000 noughts to the number one and you have the figure. "That number is such an imponderable in the universe that I am 100 percent certain that life could not have started spontaneously on Earth," says Wickramasinghe.

As they write in their book: "Once we saw that the probability of life originating at random is so utterly minuscule as to make it absurd, it became sensible to think that the properties of physics on which life depends are in every respect deliberate."

"Sir Fred Hoyle was tending much more than I towards the higher intelligence Creator," Wickramasinghe explains. "I used to argue against it, but I found myself losing every argument. At the moment I can't find any rational argument to knock down the view which argues for conversion to God. If I could have found an argument – even a flimsy one I would not have been a party to what we wrote in the book. We used to have open minds; now we realize that the only logical answer to life is creation, and not accidental shuffling. I still hope that one day I may go back to favour a purely mechanistic explanation – I say 'hope,' because I still cannot come to terms with my conversion."

"My being a Buddhist – albeit not an ardent one – was never a problem, because it is an atheistic religion which does not profess to know anything about creation and does not have a creator built into it. But I now find myself driven to this position by logic. There is no other way in which we can understand the precise ordering of the chemicals of the universe except to invoke creation on a cosmic scale."

Until recently, belief in God was considered to be a mere personal creed, unsupported by rational thought. In recent decades, however, this situation has changed. Now evidence has again and again come to light which makes belief in God a scientifically credible concept, rather than just an institutionalized form of anthropomorphism providing a personally desirable creed.

The latest findings of science impress upon man the abstract reality of God's existence. Granted that there is a God, what should man's relationship with Him be? Science does not and cannot occupy itself with this problem. This is a question which can only be answered by religion.

Basically, all religions do attempt to answer this question, but to what extent they are successful is difficult to determine considering that, besides Islam, no world religion has been preserved in its original form. Other shortcomings in present-day religions, no matter what their antiquity, are, in some cases, the absence of the concept of a God, (or Creator and Sustainer) and in other cases, the proliferation of gods and goddesses. The definition of man's relationship with God (or the absence of one) by such religions is impossible to accept, because the premises on which they base their doctrines are false. Science certainly does not support polytheism, just as it does not support unconscionable 'religious' tenets such as discrimination on the basis of colour and race.

Just as science brings one to belief in God, so also does it bring one to belief in Islam, for Islam is the only religion which is completely consistent with scientific facts. Science shows that the universe has a God – a fact, which in itself, is enough to prove the agnostics wrong. A study of the cosmos shows that it operates in unity and harmony, thus ruling out the possibility of there being many gods, as is claimed by certain religions. Conversely, such a study makes it abundantly clear that there can be only one God – a concept faithfully presented by Islam, but by no other religion. And as for man's relationship with God, the only religion which can properly define it is, again, Islam.

## Ego and conscience

From the Qur'an we learn that man is born with two distinct and often opposing faculties: *nafs 'ammara* (12:53) and *nafs lawwama* (75:2). In today's terminology they are more familiar to us as 'ego' and 'conscience.'

In normal circumstances, one's ego lies dormant, but when provoked, the egoistic temperament being one of rebelliousness, it leads us into all manner of evils. It has very aptly been said that "when one's ego is touched, it turns into superego, and the result is breakdown."

But the side of one's nature which is ruled by conscience – *nafs lawwama* – is the very opposite because of its inherited function of distinguishing between right and wrong. One whose conscience is truly alive experiences pleasure in doing what is correct, and shame in doing what is wrong.

It is a wise man who avoids wounding the ego of a potential rival. The ego should be allowed to slumber peacefully. It is his conscience which must be aroused, for it is that God-given part of his mentality which, in distinguishing between right and wrong, will never allow the ego to assert itself. When one probes more deeply into the conflicts of modern times, one finds invariably that it is the ego which has been aroused and has run amuck.

According to the Qur'an, the conscience is the creation of God and, as such, is changeless. We must learn to look upon it, therefore, as a Master Key. If we succeed in finding it, and using it judiciously, all the doors which seem at the moment to be so irrevocably closed to friendship and cooperation will at once be thrown open to mutual understanding and harmonious social living.



## Criticism and denigration

The Qur'an states that God instructed His Prophet to say to his opponents: "I have received veritable proofs from my Lord, yet you deny Him" (6:57). This shows that a Prophet in this world stands on the bedrock of reason. His is not an idle claim: he is supported by clear evidence.

The disbelievers, on the other hand, are recorded by the Qur'an as saying, "Give no heed to this Qur'an. Interrupt its reading with booing and laughter, so that you may gain the upper hand" (41:26).

Those who wish to reject a statement but who cannot counter it with sound arguments, not infrequently fall back on derision or add homineum. That is to say that they attempt to discredit the statement by shouting it down and raising false or irrelevant objections to it. In every age, this is what the Prophets have had to suffer at the hands of their opponents.

The way to deal with a statement of which one is critical is not to make personal attacks upon the speaker, or add to, subtract from, or distort the original statement, but to counter it with some rational argument supported by an array of facts. This is sound and correct criticism, and as such is not only permissible but desirable. On the other hand, rejecting a statement outright without referring to it in its original form, and without presenting any cogent argument against it, is an unfair, and reprehensible practice.

When the exponent of a fact, or facts expresses himself in a cool and reasoned way while his opponents adopt a derogatory or even defamatory tone, this difference in approach is a sure indication that the former is in the right and his opponents are in the wrong. The Qur'an tells us that the language of the prophets is the language of Reason, while it is the men of no faith who mouth the language of disparagement.

## The saddest of spectacles

The Prophet Muhammad is recorded by Abu Hurayrah as stating that in worldly matters you should look, not at those above you, but at those below you. Only in this way will you be able to appreciate God's bounty.

In the distribution of worldly benefits, there is no uniformity; some have less and some have more. And this is a state of affairs which has perennially aroused envy and created friction in society. Now, if an individual compares himself to one who is apparently less well-endowed than himself, he will be filled with a sense of gratitude. But if he always has an eye on those who seem better placed in life, his soul will become corroded with ingratitude.

A simple way of guarding oneself from this emotional evil is to compare oneself to those who have less than oneself and not with those who have more. Sheikh Saadi (1213-1292) one of the greatest figures in classical Persian literature, writes that he had no shoes and walked barefoot. Seeing people wearing shoes, he wondered why he had been denied such things. No sooner had this thought entered his head than he came upon a man with no feet. He was at once full of gratitude, and thanked God for showing him the greater munificence of granting him the use of two healthy feet.

God desires that each and everyone of His servants should be thankful to Him, but, for this to become a reality, we must all subject ourselves to a constant process of self-appraisal. This means assessing the truly positive aspects of our lives in relation to others, and an unceasing scrutiny of our thoughts so that we should not unwittingly allow ourselves to slip into negativism. The sight of a man consumed with envy is the saddest of spectacles.

## Who will tell the truth?

Mr. Natwar Singh, former Indian Ambassador to China and Pakistan, mentions the celebrated Chinese author, Han Suyin in his book, *Curtain Raiser* which was published in 1983. It seems that she had become a friend of his, and one chapter of his book is devoted to certain letters she had written to him. In one letter, dated June 14, 1980, she expressed a great desire to learn about Islam: "I do intend to have a very long talk with you on Islam."

No further details of her quest for truth are given either in the letter or elsewhere, and we can perhaps assume that Han Suyin had not up to that point found a Muslim from whom she could have the kind of information that she needed. Possibly she felt that because Mr. Natwar Singh came from India, where the Muslim population is second only to that of Indonesia, and also perhaps because he had been India's ambassador to Pakistan, he might be in a position to enlighten her.

How many people there are in this world who are in quest of the Truth, but who are fated to be disappointed because they can find no one to give them the information they desire.

Should anyone in this day and age set himself up as a prophet, all Muslims would unite to put him down. But the irony of it is that in their daily existence they are so oblivious of the Final Prophet's mission that they appear to be waiting for the arrival of a new 'Prophet' who will discharge this duty on their behalf? This is the state of affairs today when there are no less than 100 crores of Muslims spread all over the world. What has happened to the old quest for truth? And who will tell the truth to its seekers.?

## Faith: The great discovery

The marked zeal and fervour which was found in the early pioneering Muslims is sadly absent in the present generation. How is this difference of attitude to be explained? It can perhaps be attributed to the fact that Islam was, to the pioneering Muslims a discovery – a new reality. For modern Muslims, Islam is, on the contrary, an imitative faith which has been handed down to them as a moral legacy by their forebears; it is not something for which they have toiled; it is not something they have discovered as a new and superior reality.

The experience of fresh enlightenment has a revitalizing effect upon a man's life, for it awakens in him to the highest degree aptitudes for thought and action which had hitherto lain dormant. The man who finds nothing new in life is like a sleepwalker, going through the motions of everyday existence like an automaton. But the man who finds something new and of moral value in life is like one who has awakened from his slumber, moving from a state of mental inertia to that of the most acute cerebral activity.

Modern research tends to corroborate this thesis, one of the aims of this particular field of study having been to pinpoint the factor which prompted some people to greater activity than others. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica (1984): 'Psychological experiments in the fields of motivation and learning have disclosed the power of novelty as an inducement to action' (III/227).

Evidently the only way to awaken a living faith in the Muslims of today, is to make his faith once again a great discovery for him.